



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[Docket No. FWS–R4–ES–2021–0018; FXES11140400000-212-FF04EF4000]

Receipt of Incidental Take Permit Application and Proposed Habitat Conservation Plan for the Sand Skink, Lake County, FL; Categorical Exclusion

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability; request for comment and information.

SUMMARY: We, the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), announce receipt of an application from VK Avalon Groves LLC (applicant) for an incidental take permit (ITP) under the Endangered Species Act. The applicant requests the ITP to take the federally listed sand skink incidental to construction in Lake County, Florida. We request public comment on the application, which includes the applicant’s proposed habitat conservation plan (HCP), and the Service’s preliminary determination that this HCP qualifies as “low-effect,” categorically excluded, under the National Environmental Policy Act. To make this determination, we used our environmental action statement and low-effect screening form, both of which are also available for public review.

DATES: We must receive your written comments on or before **[INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*]**.

ADDRESSES: *Obtaining Documents:* You may obtain copies of the documents online in Docket No. FWS–R4–ES–2021–0018 at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

Submitting Comments: If you wish to submit comments on any of the documents, you may do so in writing by any of the following methods:

- *Online:* <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments on Docket No. FWS–R4–ES–2021–0018.
- *U.S. mail:* Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. FWS–R4–ES–2021–

0018; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS: PRB/3W, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041–3803.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Erin M. Gawera, by telephone at (904) 731–3121 or via email at erin_gawera@fws.gov. Individuals who are hearing or speech impaired may call the Federal Relay Service at 1–800–877–8339 for TTY assistance.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: We, the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), announce receipt of an application from VK Avalon Groves LLC for an incidental take permit (ITP) under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA; 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*). The applicant requests the ITP to take the federally listed sand skink (*Neoseps reynoldsi*) incidental to the construction of a multi-family housing development (Serenoa Village 4) (project) in Lake County, Florida. We request public comment on the application, which includes the applicant’s proposed habitat conservation plan (HCP), and on the Service’s preliminary determination that this HCP qualifies as “low-effect,” categorically excluded, under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. 4231 *et seq.*). To make this determination, we used our environmental action statement and low-effect screening form, both of which are also available for public review.

Project

The applicant requests a 5-year ITP to take sand skinks through the conversion of approximately 1 acre (ac) of occupied sand skink foraging and sheltering habitat incidental to the construction of a multi-family housing development located on a 20-ac parcel in Section 24, Township 24 South, Range 26 East, Lake County, Florida, identified by Parcel ID number 24-24-26-0001-000-01800. The applicant proposes to mitigate for take of the sand skinks by the purchase of 2 credits from Lake Wales Ridge Conservation Bank or another Service-approved Conservation Bank. The Service would require the applicant to purchase the credits prior to engaging in activities associated with the project

on the parcel.

Public Availability of Comments

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made available to the public. While you may request that we withhold your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Our Preliminary Determination

The Service has made a preliminary determination that the applicant's project, including land clearing, infrastructure building, landscaping, and the proposed mitigation measures, would individually and cumulatively have a minor or negligible effect on sand skinks and the environment. Therefore, we have preliminarily concluded that the ITP for this project would qualify for categorical exclusion and that the HCP is low effect under our NEPA regulations at 43 CFR 46.205 and 46.210. A low-effect HCP is one that would result in (1) minor or negligible effects on federally listed, proposed, and candidate species and their habitats; (2) minor or negligible effects on other environmental values or resources; and (3) impacts that, when considered together with the impacts of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable similarly situated projects, would not over time result in significant cumulative effects to environmental values or resources.

Next Steps

The Service will evaluate the application and the comments received to determine whether to issue the requested permit. We will also conduct an intra-Service consultation pursuant to section 7 of the ESA to evaluate the effects of the proposed take. After considering the above findings, we will determine whether the permit issuance criteria of section 10(a)(1)(B) of the ESA have been met. If met, the Service will issue ITP number PER0002632 to VK Avalon Groves LLC.

Authority

The Service provides this notice under section 10(c) of the ESA (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.) and its implementing regulations (50 CFR 17.32) and NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) and its implementing regulations (40 CFR 1506.6 and 43 CFR 46.305).

Jay Herrington,

Field Supervisor,

Jacksonville Field Office.

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